

Nehemiah 8:13-18 (New International Version)

13 On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law.

14 They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month

15 and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: "Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters"—as it is written.^[a]

16 So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves temporary shelters on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim.

17 The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. **And their joy was very great.**

18 Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

Footnotes:

- a. [Nehemiah 8:15](#) See Lev. 23:37-40.

Good Morning, My Sisters and Brothers in Christ. Psalm 118:

*²⁴This is the day which the LORD hath made;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.¹(KJV)*

Rejoice, have joy, celebrate. When was the last time you could honestly say:

*I was glad when they said unto me,
Let us go into the house of the LORD. (Psa 122:1 KJV)
I rejoiced with those who said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the LORD."*

For the next three Sundays we will be talking about rejoicing, and celebrating what the Lord has done, is doing and will do in our lives and therefore in the lives of this church. So if you have not already given thought to the joy that comes with knowing and serving the Lord, I pray that you will - during the next three weeks. Let me tell you what I know, when you want to get to worship, are excited, and glad, about serving the Lord everything goes better, you find courage and strength to do things you did not think you could do and you even begin to take joy in some of the mundane things in your life.

This month we continue with our sermon series on the return of the Children of Israel to the Promised Land. For those of you who are struggling with the order of the historical calendar here is a brief overview:

- the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were taken into captivity by King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylon Empire
- King Nebuchadnezzar was overthrown by King Cyrus of the Persian Empire
- King Cyrus offers the opportunity to return to **city** of Jerusalem in a **land** now called Judah
- Group One lead by Zerubbabel – rebuilt temple
- Group Two lead by Ezra – rebuilt their spiritual needs

¹ all scripture from BibleGateway.com NIV unless otherwise noted

- Group Three lead by Nehemiah – rebuilt the city walls
- From the time of captivity to the rebuilding of the temple is 70 years
 - fulfilling Jeremiah’s prophecy
- From the arrival of Group One to the arrival on Group Three is also 70 years

This morning we begin to consider the story as told by Nehemiah. We join the story at the point where the city walls have been rebuilt, the people have heard the reading of the law by Ezra and now they are ready to follow the directions contained within the law. The 12th verse says:

*12 Then all the people went away to eat and drink,
to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy,
because they now understood the words that had been
made known to them.*

In order for you to grasp what is going on in the text you must remember that for about 70 years the Children of Israel, the chosen people of God lived away from their homeland. In addition to being away from home they were also away from the Word of God. Without the Word of God to guide them they had moved away from what Scripture taught and they had been doing their own thing. Among other things they had married non-Jews, which God had forbidden. They had begun to serve idols along with God, forgetting that God had said they were to have no other God, but Him. And they had forgotten to keep the Sabbath and observe the feasts days as outlined in the Law of Moses. (What we now call the books of Law or first five books of the Old Testament.)

When Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem to encourage and supervise the rebuilding of the walls of the city two things happen:

1. Ezra reads to them what they should be doing as people of God
2. They receive the Word and begin to do something about it

Some scholars say that those seven days were a revival:

- A reawaking to their responsibilities to the Lord and

- A recommitment to live up to those responsibilities.

Once again we are faced with a passage that has multiple and varied sermons to be preached:

we could raise the question – ARE YOU IN NEED OF REVIVAL?
 we could ask –WHAT DO YOU NEED TO WORSHIP?
 we could ponder – DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE WORD SAYS?

Anyone one of those would preach. But I am asking you to reach a little deeper and let us consider:

WHERE DO YOU GO FOR YOUR JOY?

SHALL WE PRAY!

Father God we come this morning trying to make sense of where we are on this journey. From one week to the next we try and fail to do what you tell us to do. Yet here we are again, asking you to allow us to enter into your presence. We need you! We need you to reorder our priorities. We need you to help us recommit to you. We need to understand that you are the source of our strength and our joy. Please help us to hear from heaven today and all through the week. Jehovah Jireh I come asking you to provide the message your people need to hear. Empty me out and allow your spirit to enter in. I want to be fully your servant. In the name of your Son Jesus the Christ we pray. AMEN and AMEN.

WHERE DO YOU GO FOR YOUR JOY?

If you are a part of the Adult Bible Study (ABS) or have been reading along with us you know that we are studying stewardship: stewardship of our time, our talents and our tithe. Yet anytime we begin to talk about money someone gets a little uncomfortable and perhaps falls into those old traps of “all the church talks about is money”. But I am asking you to be tolerant this morning and consider with me that the church is not the only place talking about money.

- sale papers, catalogs, coupons are printed media about money
- commercials, telephone solicitations, and door-to-door solicitations are about money
- good schools, better teachers, varied programming about money

If we wish to do research without ads –things designed to get us to spend money – then we have to spend money to have an ad free search engine. We live in a society that is consumer driven and that means money.

One of the things we have spent some time talking about in ABS is who we are and how that relates to our spending habits, again, not just spending money, but spending our time and our talents. **Could I get someone to agree that we spend our time and talents and money to please ourselves?**

- Our: clothes, shoes, jewelry, make-up, spa treatments
- Our: address, landscaping, car, country club and health club
- Our: degrees, our children's schools, even our friends

are designed, selected and cultivated to please ourselves. Do you agree? While all of these things are pleasing, I wonder if they bring us any joy? I wish to submit to you that if things, any of our possessions or accomplishments brought us joy then there would come a time when we were satisfied. We would declare that we have enough.

WHERE DO YOU GO FOR YOUR JOY?

Joy is a word often used in the English language interchangeably with happy. Joy however is different from happy. Happy comes from the same root as "happens" and suggests to us that happy is something that happens. It is not permanent; it is often short lived and generally depends on a set of circumstances.

- the surprise party made me happy
- finding my lost wallet made happy
- neighbors turning down the music made me happy

But joy is not dependent on a set of circumstances, happening or events. Joy is a Fruit of the Spirit.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5)

Another way of saying this is joy is a gift from God. The modern day psalmist says this joy that I have, the world did not give it and the world cannot take it away.

Fruits of the Spirit and Gifts of the Spirit however, should not be confused. One scholar says it this way:

“So many today seek the Gifts without first acquiring the Fruit in their life.
We must have the Fruit of the Spirit at work,
if we want God to entrust us with the Gifts of the Spirit.²”

Gifts of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12

1. Word of Wisdom
2. Word of Knowledge
3. Faith
4. Healings
5. Working of Miracles
6. Prophecy
7. Discerning of Spirits
8. Different Kinds of Tongues
9. Interpretation of Tongues

Fruits of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23

1. Love
2. Joy
3. Peace
4. Longsuffering
5. Kindness
6. Goodness
7. Faithfulness
8. Gentleness
9. Self Control³

Scripture has a few things to say about joy. In the Old Testament Joy is repeatedly shown to be the natural outcome of fellowship with God.⁴

*You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psa 16:11)*

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

Joy is found as the result of the loving kindness of God

*Surely you have granted him unending blessings
and made him glad with the joy of your presence. (Psa 21:6)*

² <http://www.theholyspirit.com/HolySpiritGiftsFruits.asp> accessed 08.03.2013

³ <http://www.theholyspirit.com/HolySpiritGiftsFruits.asp> accessed 08.04.2013

⁴ <https://net.bible.org/#!search/joy>

Joy is found in words of comfort

*15 Lord, you understand;
remember me and care for me.
Avenge me on my persecutors.
You are long-suffering—do not take me away;
think of how I suffer reproach for your sake.
16 When your words came, I ate them;
they were my joy and my heart's delight,
for I bear your name,
Lord God Almighty. (Jeremiah 15:15-16)*

WHERE DO YOU GO FOR YOUR JOY?

Although the OT has many and varied mentions of the sources of our joy. I get excited about the things we learn in the NT about joy.

*¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid.
I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.
¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;
he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

At the very **beginning of His life** the angels say that the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord was a cause for great joy.

In the **midst of His teaching ministry** Jesus taught this about joy:

⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

At the end of His life Paul described the Joy in this way

²Looking away [from all that will distract] to Jesus, Who is the Leader and the Source of our faith [giving the first incentive for our belief] and is also its Finisher [bringing it to maturity and perfection]. He, for the joy [of obtaining the prize] that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising and ignoring the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12 Amplified Bible)

The Jews who had returned to Jerusalem learned that

Joy was not found when they built their houses

Joy was not found when the temple was finished

Joy was not found when the walls had been constructed

Joy was found when they heard the Word and allowed it to change their hearts

I ask again and for the final time in this sermon:

WHERE DO YOU GO FOR YOUR JOY?

VERSE 1

When I've lost my direction
You're the compass for my way
You're the fire and light
When nights are long and cold
In sadness, You're my laughter
That shatters all my fears
When I'm all alone, Your hand is there to hold

CHORUS

Jesus, You're the center of my joy
All that's good and perfect comes from You
You're the heart of my contentment
Hope for all I do
Jesus, You're the center of my joy⁵

⁵ <http://www.metrolyrics.com/jesus-youre-the-center-of-my-joy-lyrics-richard-smallwood.html>